

Jim Frates retires, was former Moose Range Chief

by Samantha Bartling



Jim Frates, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Operations Specialist, at the Swanson River Field discovery well. USFWS Photo by Tiffany A. S. Parson.

With two radio stations, no fast food establishments, no stoplights, and soon after the “glaciers had retreated from the Kenai lowlands,” Jim Frates arrived on the Kenai Peninsula in 1977 as the new Manager of the Kenai National Moose Range. He is now retiring, after seeing the Moose Range re-named Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in 1980, and with a total of 34 years with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Jim’s departure marks the end of an outstanding

career and leaves a space in the Refuge’s organizational chart that will be tough to fill. His jobs have ranged from Refuge Manager to his current job of Refuge Operations Specialist, where he oversees mechanical and facilities operations, as well as oil and gas activities on the refuge. Oil and gas operations on a National Wildlife Refuge are a delicate matter. Since 1957, oil companies have had a Congressionally-mandated right to explore and develop petroleum resources on the non-wilderness parts of the refuge. Jim’s job was to assist oil and gas activities, so that the work could be done without compromising the Refuge’s purposes of protecting wildlife habitat. As one can imagine, this is no easy task. Years of experience, a personable style, and a quick wit have served Jim well in this balancing act. Brian Millyard, a Marathon Oil Field Operator, says that “I really appreciate all Jim has done; he is just a really good guy.” Jim’s co-worker, mechanic Al O’Guinn, echoes Millyard’s comments, “He is one of the nicest guys I’ve ever worked with. He is highly respected and will be greatly missed.”

Jim’s path through the USFWS to Alaska’s Kenai National Wildlife Refuge started in the Lower-48 where Jim graduated from Colorado State University in 1963. Upon graduation he worked as a pheasant research biologist for both the Nebraska and South Dakota Game Commissions, moving in 1965 to District Game Manager for a seven-county region in northeastern South Dakota. This job led to his 1966 entrance into the US Fish and Wildlife Service as an assistant refuge manager at the Tamarac NWR in Minnesota. Between 1968 and 1973, Jim served as Refuge Manager on the Lostwood, Desoto, and DesLacs Refuges. Four years later, in 1977, Jim saw his first moose, outside of a zoo setting. “Oddly enough, (the moose) was the first local resident I saw after entering the Kenai city limits,” which began his 17-year stint on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Jim was Refuge Manager from 1977 until 1980 when he transferred to the USFWS’s Anchorage Regional office to participate in developing long-range conservation plans for Refuges in the Bristol Bay/Aleutian Islands region. In 1985 Jim returned to Kenai Refuge to undertake his current position.

As Jim takes a look back on his career, he notes: “Working with people who passionately care about the resources and critters with which they are charged with protecting and managing was kind of personal ‘glue’ which kept me so attached to my job for so many years.” One of Jim’s most memorable moments was initiating the construction of the new headquarters/visitor center; the building atop Ski Hill Road would not be the hub of the 1.92 million-acre, without his efforts.

Upon retirement, when the beginning of the work-week approaches, Jim plans on sleeping a bit later and enjoying the fact that an alarm clock will no longer be a trigger to the start of the day. He plans on staying in the Kenai-Soldotna area where his wife Marlene will continue working with the Kenai Peninsula School District. Jim’s son Brad works for Phillips Petroleum

on the slope, and son Bobby is Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Kenai, while daughter Barbara lives in Boise. Jim expects that writing, photography, and yard work will be taking the place of meetings, e-mails, reports, and deadlines. With honor, accomplishments, and years of dedication in his wake, Jim exits the Service noting that “Even though it’s sometimes a staggering concept, I’ll miss the feeling going to work each morning with the recognition that the entire public was my employer.”

Samantha Bartling is an intern with the Student Conservation Education Program at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.